

Making and Being Made:

Some preliminary thoughts on craft-education as a model for Christian formation:¹

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Abstract: Craft-education was an important pedagogical model in the ancient world, but its importance was obscured by the common contrast between rhetoric and philosophy. Christian writers such as Gregory of Nyssa used craft-education as a model for Christian formation, because of its powerful emphasis on commitment, time, effort and the willingness of both pupil and teacher to submit to change. In the latter part of my article I will offer a preliminary assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of craft-education as a model for the process of Christian formation.

Key words: craft, education, formation, teaching, learning, rhetoric, philosophy, *technē*

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a. Introduction

In this article I argue that craft-education was an important pedagogical model in the ancient world, but one which was obscured by the common contrast between rhetoric and philosophy. Taking my inspiration from that fact that early Christian writers used craft-education as a model for Christian formation, in the latter part of my article I will offer a preliminary assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of this approach. In the course of my argument, I will rely on some background assumptions, which I take to be fairly universal among Christian theologians of the first five centuries. First, there was no essential difference between what one might call theology, systematic theology or doctrine and, on the other, practical theology or Christian ethics. Practical advice on how to act was based on more fundamental theological principles; conversely, early Christians saw mistakes about dogma as much in terms of moral as intellectual error. The present-day distinction between systematic and practical theology is largely due to the modern organisation of theology into sub-disciplines. Secondly, for most early Christian theologians 'ethics' meant a theory of virtue. This was usually broadly Aristotelian in its assumptions about habit and the mean, although one also frequently finds Stoic influence. Finally, ancient discussions of education almost universally assume that teaching has an ethical dimension. Consequently, my argument is not only about the teaching of ethics (as an essential part of Christian formation), but it is also, and more fundamentally, about the ethics of teaching.

b. Lecture vs conversation (rhetoric vs philosophy)

It is easy to assume that just two models of education are under debate in classical texts: one based on the giving/receiving of extended discourse (usually a speech, but also a written text) and the other on conversational exchange. These models were commonly

associated by the ancients with rhetoric and philosophy respectively and today it is tempting to equate them with the modern university lecture (and other kinds of passive learning) on the one hand, and more conversational and active forms of learning and teaching on the other.

Plato's dialogues collectively provide a classic example of the discussion of ancient models of education. Socrates, as interpreted by Plato, appears to debunk the idea that teaching is simply the transfer of raw information from one person to another. Rather, he advocates a method of teaching by which pupils discover the truth for themselves under guidance from their teacher. In the *Theaetetus* this model of learning is expressed through the metaphor of a midwife. Knowledge must be brought to birth by the pupil. The philosophical midwife has the experience to guide, comfort, offer practical support and alleviate pain; she cannot give birth to the baby herself.²

Essential to this model is the concept of dialectic, that is, a form of reasoned discourse structured as a conversation or as question and answer. Rather than being on the receiving end of a lecture, the pupil can answer back. Like the midwife who is responsive to the needs of her particular patient, the philosopher—the midwife of the soul—is responsive to each specific pupil.³ This sets conversational exchange above extended discourse as a mediator of the truth. Consequently, in the *Phaedrus* (which sets out the parameters of good discourse), Socrates pronounces that written texts are not bad in themselves, but can only serve as a useful reminder of the truth for those who have already learnt from

² Plato, *Theaetetus*, 148e-151d.

³ On the importance of knowing one's particular pupil: Plato, *Phaedrus*, 271d.

engagement with ‘living breathing discourse of the man who knows’.⁴ Dialectic—conversation—is the form of speech which allows that kind of deep engagement.⁵

Many other classical authors rehearse this dichotomy between two forms of teaching: on the one hand, a teacher’s attempt to convey and control knowledge through a lecture or a written text and, on the other, a deeply-personal, conversational and mutual interaction between a teacher and his pupil. This dichotomy was shored up by the classic rivalry between rhetoric and philosophy.⁶ The orator produced public speeches or lectures which facilitated widespread communication for the common good (especially in a democracy), but which were compromised by the audience’s inability to question or answer back and by the orator’s use of emotion and other persuasive techniques. The philosopher, on the other hand, engaged his pupil in one-to-one rational conversation resolutely focussed on the truth, a method which allowed for critical engagement, but which was not well-suited to promoting debate across a whole community. Consequently, philosophers were accused of keeping the truth to themselves.⁷

However, the way in which Plato contrasts the pedagogic value of continuous discourse with dialectic is deeply problematic. First, Socrates’ account of good speech in the

⁴ Plato, *Phaedrus* 271d.

⁵ Plato, *Phaedrus* 276d-277a.

⁶ e.g. S. Halliwell, ‘Philosophy and Rhetoric’ in *Persuasion: Greek Rhetoric in Action* I. Worthington (ed) (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1994), pp.222–43 and B. Vickers, ‘Territorial Disputes: Philosophy vs Rhetoric’. in *ibid. In Defence of Rhetoric* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1988).

⁷ Themistius (317–c. 390 AD) articulates both sides of the argument in order to argue that philosophy and rhetoric needed each other: Themistius *Oration* 26, trans. R. Penella, *The Private Orations of Themistius* (Berkeley: University of California, 2000), pp. 140–163.

Phaedrus is not a good a description of what either Socrates or Plato actually do. At best Socrates' practice of dialectic allows for a process of step-by-step critique of common assumptions which leads to the discovery of the truth; at worst it is a deeply manipulative process by which he leads his hapless conversation-partners through a process of relentless question and answer to a *reductio ad absurdum*. Plato is the author of a long series of written texts, many of which combine dialectic with long narrative speeches (—see especially the *Republic*). Secondly, historians argue that the rhetoric-philosophy contrast is itself a rhetorical trope, used both by philosophers and teachers of rhetoric to establish their superiority as a profession and win pupils in a competitive market.⁸ Thirdly, and most crucially for the argument of this paper, the dichotomy obscures a third, extremely widespread understanding of education in the ancient world—that is, education as craft-apprenticeship.

c. Learning a craft

The classical Greek word *technē* is notoriously difficult to translate: it can, according to context, be translated as art, craft, skill, or technique.⁹ Its usual range of meaning is positive to neutral, but it can sometimes be employed pejoratively to mean cunning or tricksiness. In other words, it is a term with a broad application. Nevertheless, it also has a

⁸ e.g. J. Hesk, Jon. 'The Rhetoric of Anti-Rhetoric in Athenian Oratory' in *Performance Culture and Athenian Democracy* S. Goldhill and R. Osborne (eds) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp.201–30.

⁹ Anne Balansard, *Technè dans les Dialogues de Platon : l'empreinte de la sophistique* (Sankt Augustin : Academia, 2001), 16–17.

very specific core meaning in both classical and Christian sources—one which embeds the notion of education as formation.

In essence, *technē* is defined by four things:¹⁰

- **First**, each *technē* relates to a **field of knowledge** which range from the very specific and well-defined (like knowledge of the principles of geometry or knowing how to play the clarinet) to the very broad, like medical knowledge.
- **Secondly**, a *technē* is learned by imitating a **particular teacher**, rather than by memorising certain facts.¹¹ In other words, the concept of *technē* is inseparable from human relationship, specifically a kind of apprenticeship, usually undertaken alongside other apprentices.¹² The ancient writers are emphatic that this kind of learning involves time, effort and life-changing commitment: it is, in the fullest sense, a discipline.
- **Thirdly**, *technē* is almost universally assumed to bring about **something which is, broadly speaking, good for society**.¹³ Medicine is regarded as an archetypal *technē*:

¹⁰ The following definition is my own, based on my reading of Balansard, *Techné*; Jörg Kube, *TEXNH UND APETH; sophistisches und platonisches Tugendwissen* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1969). and especially David Roochnik, *Of Art and Wisdom: Plato's Understanding of Techne* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), especially 20 and 26. For a more detailed discussion see Morwenna Ludlow, *Art, Craft and Theology in Fourth Century Christian Authors*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), chap. 1.

¹¹ See, e.g. Frances Margaret Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997), 257.: 'Mimēsis lay at the heart of apprenticeship, whether in skills leading to a trade or a profession, or in those virtues which shaped a moral and spiritual life': p. 257.

¹² For the notion of the workshop as a learning space, see Ludlow, *Art, Craft and Theology*, Chapter 10.

¹³ Roochnik, *Of Art and Wisdom*, 20, 26.

although it is recognised that a physician could use his skills to cause disease as well as healing, there seems to be a root assumption that he ought not to.¹⁴

- **Fourthly**, *technē* has a range of outcomes: some craftspeople create products like boats, houses or pots; others bring about a particular state-of-affairs like health. For others, the craft activity is the product itself, so for example, the craft of playing the clarinet simply leads to clarinet-playing.¹⁵

There is a common assumption in modern scholarship that *technē* properly only applies to practices which lead to separable products (boats, houses or pots). It is true that Aristotle tends to define *technē* in this way and that he subordinates practices which lead to separable products to practices which bring about certain states-of-affairs (like medicine) and especially to practices which are ends in themselves, notably contemplation or *theoria*.¹⁶ However, this was not the only ancient perspective. An alternative view-point is found in Basil of Caesarea's *Sermons on the Six Days of Creation (Hexameron)*:

¹⁴ One could conclude from the broad literature on the misuse of *technē* theme that all *technē* is value-neutral (it is how it is used that makes the difference): see, for example, Roochnik on Aristotle (Roochnik, 31.) and Sennett on Hannah Arendt (Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (London: Penguin Books, 2009), 1–5.). However, I suggest that the 'problem' of the bad use of *technē* logically assumes the prior assumption that *technē* ought to result in a useful and good outcome.

¹⁵ It is true that some philosophers associate a *technē* with a separable product; but on the whole, the Christian authors dealt with here accept this broader concept, for reasons which will become obvious.

¹⁶ This tidy definition helps Aristotle solve the knotty problem of whether philosophy is a *technē* or not. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I.1 (1094a; 1140a). Balansard, *Techné*, pp. 5-12; cf Roochnik, *Of Art and Wisdom*, pp. 1-14.

Among arts (*technai*), some have in view production (*poiētikai*), some practice (*praktikai*), others theory (*theōrētikai*). The object of the last is the exercise of thought, that of the second, the motion of the body. Should it cease, all stops; nothing more is to be seen. Thus, dancing and music leave nothing behind; they have no object but themselves. In creative arts on the contrary the work lasts after the operation. Such is architecture—such are the arts which work in wood and brass and weaving, all those indeed which, even when the artisan (the *technitēs*) has disappeared, serve to show an industrious (*technikos*) intelligence and to cause the architect, the worker in brass or the weaver, to be admired on account of his work.¹⁷

Here Basil certainly does not disparage crafts which lead to a product, because his whole point in the immediate context of this passage is to point to the beauties of the natural world in order to praise the skill and goodness of their creator, God, whom Basil like other early fathers frequently refers to as a craftsperson or artisan (*technitēs*). I have shown elsewhere that this is a common perspective on *technē*.¹⁸ Although it is true that intellectuals like Aristotle and Cicero disparaged craftsmanship compared to the liberal arts such as rhetoric and philosophy, this was a very one-sided viewpoint.¹⁹ Material evidence

¹⁷ Basil, *Hexameron* I.7 (NPNF).

¹⁸ Ludlow, *Art, Craft and Theology*.

¹⁹ Cicero *De officiis* I.150-1. The idea that the ancients disparaged craftsmanship is based on selective reading which prioritises writers such as Aristotle and Cicero; Balansard argues it was encouraged by Marxist historiography (Balansard, *Technè*, 6–7.).

such as grave-markers, for example, shows that artisans had a strong and confident pride in their profession and its value to society.²⁰

The concept which is central to *technē* is not the application of techniques to create a separable product, but rather the notions of knowledge and learning. In this, the ancient concept of *technē* resonates strikingly with the school of modern writing which, from Morris and Ruskin onwards, has aimed to re-establish a broad continuum of kinds of human making.²¹ They acknowledge that a craft can give rise to a product, or a new state-of-affairs, or can consist in an activity itself.²² They emphasise the fact that a craft can include both highly material practices, like carpentry, and intensely intellectual ones, like computer-programming.²³ Over against this broad scope of activities which can be labelled 'crafts' one can find a fairly consistent emphasis on certain key principles. Uniting the ideas of knowledge and apprenticeship, modern craft theorists are particularly interested in the idea that craft involves 'tacit knowledge' – that is, knowledge in a particular field which is acquired by learning from the example of an expert or experts.²⁴ This is usually assumed to include some kind of personal contact, even if it is, as with Richard Sennett's computer

²⁰ e.g. Peter Stewart, *The Social History of Roman Art* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 18–28.

²¹ Some working with 'art' others with 'craft' as an umbrella term.

²² See e.g. David Jones, 'Art and Sacrament', in *Epoch and Artist: Selected Writings*, ed. Harman Grisewood (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), 153. 'the whole field of human making: boot-making, English prose, radar, horticulture, carpentry'; further examples include the activities of bowling a beautiful ball in cricket and liturgy.

²³ For these and many other examples see Sennett, *The Craftsman*.

²⁴ Sennett, 50–60; Christopher Frayling, *On Craftsmanship: Towards a New Bauhaus* (London: Oberon Books, 2011), 40–46 and 69–74; Glenn Adamson, *Thinking through Craft* (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2007), 78–81.

programmers, one pupil learning from an online master on the other side of the world.²⁵

Like ancient writers they frequently emphasise the time and effort required.

d. Learning and teaching as formation

Craft-education, then, is key to the concept of ancient *technē* and modern craft. The ancients were united in the belief that a true *technē* could not be learned easily. Pupils had to learn by example from their teachers: watching them, listening to them and copying them. Expertise was gained from multiple repetitions: thus, a young man learning rhetoric would be made to compose many speeches on a certain kind of theme, before he was regarded as expert.²⁶

Early Christian writers frequently use the craft model of a pupil learning a practice through imitation and repetition. Gregory of Nyssa, for example, describes ascetic formation in this way:

There are indeed written instructions teaching these things [which are necessary for a truly Christian life], but clearer than verbal instruction is guidance by example. It's not at all annoying for those who undertake a long

²⁵ Sennett, *The Craftsman*, 24–27.

²⁶ An example of this kind can be found in Augustine, *Confessions* I xvii (27). Note the distinction between rote learning and learning by repeated practice. The former involved learning certain phrases or texts by heart and then repeating them word for word. The kind of repetition involved in learning a *technē*, however, is focused on the mastery of a practice, which aimed at precision, accuracy and reliability but not identical repetition. A rhetor would practice funeral speeches so that he could reliably evoke the appropriate response in his audience; he would not say exactly the same thing every single time.

journey or a substantial voyage to meet someone who guides them... There is a workshop of the virtues, in which such an excellent life has been polished to the highest degree of precision. There is. . . much opportunity there for being taught this heavenly way of life by example, since any theory divorced from practice, however beautifully refined it may be, is like a lifeless statue (*eikōn*), displaying its blooming features in tints and colours; but the man who does what he teaches (as the Gospel says somewhere)—he is a man who is truly alive and in the prime of beauty. . .²⁷

This passage suggests that one cannot learn to be a Christian from a book alone (not even the Bible). In Gregory's other works he advises Christians to imitate Jesus Christ,²⁸ but here he acknowledges that it is helpful if they also have other teachers from whom they can learn by example. It is clear from this passage that the process of learning requires time, and effort: it therefore demands commitment from both pupil and teacher.

However, this process is described not just in terms of learning by example but also as a process of formation—that is, people are changed by it. A Christian community should be 'a workshop of the virtues' in which the 'excellent life has been polished to the highest degree of precision'. But the workshop is not just a place where practices are refined; rather, this Christian workshop of virtue produces people—the statues which are polished and coloured. In other words, the Christian workshop is in the business of forming—of shaping—Christians.

²⁷ Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity* 23.1: My translation.

²⁸ See especially, *On perfection* (*perf*) and *On the Christian Mode of Life* (*prof*).

Gregory's statue metaphor clearly alludes to the doctrine that humans were created in the divine image (Gen. 1:26-7: *eikōn* in Greek means both 'image' and 'statue'). Gregory, like other early Christian writers, sometimes refer to creation as the process by which God the artist paints or sculpts God's own image in humanity. Sin obscures or soils the image; salvation is the process by which Jesus Christ cleans the image up.²⁹ Although divine grace is absolutely necessary (especially that given in baptism), human beings have a responsibility to tend to their divine image, not least so that it is a witness to others. The truly Christian life, therefore, can be understood as the collection of practices which, with God's grace, refine God's image in oneself and attend to God's image in others. Christian formation is thus sometimes expressed as repainting the self. Gregory of Nyssa also expresses it as the sculpting of the self, adapting the Neoplatonist philosopher Plotinus's idea to a Christian theology of creation and salvation.³⁰ In sum, the image of the statue implies that the Christian pupil is shaped by the process of formation—shaped simultaneously by one's teacher and by one's own engagement with the process.

The idea that one is shaped by learning a craft and specifically through learning by example and repetition is also a very common theme in modern writing on craft—Richard Sennett even compares the commitment to repeated practice to religious ritual.³¹ It often occurs in the claim that one needs to make 10,000 pots to be a potter—an idea which is

²⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, *Making of Humankind* V.1 and *Beatitudes* I.2; Athanasius, *Incarnation* 14; *Macarian Homilies* XXX.4; John Chrysostom, *Catechetical Lectures* II.3; Ephrem's 28th *Hymn on Virginity*.

³⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, *Inscriptions of the Psalms* (trans. Heine) II.134. Cf Plotinus, *Ennead* I.6.9, quoting Plato, *Phaedrus* 252d and 254b.

³¹ Sennett, *The Craftsman*, 177–78.

difficult to pin down, but frequently credited to Bernard Leach.³² It finds concrete aesthetic expression in Edmund de Waal's series of porcelain pots, nearly, but not quite the same, repeated sequences, carefully set in different locations. These repeated sequences, which crystallise in space the craftsman's work in time, draw the viewer away from seeking in the work of art a doorway into the artist's souls and instead draw her to focus not on the craftsman but on the process of making.³³ The result of this repetition is that the practitioner continues not only to learn but continues to be shaped by his or her practice. It is no coincidence that people as diverse as Richard Sennett, Grayson Perry, and Edmund de Waal reach for quasi-religious language when they come to write about learning and to practicing a craft: commitment, ritual, spirituality, pilgrimage, for example.³⁴ But it is also connected with the shaping or the formation of the individual. Learning a craft or a technical skill can be a vital entry point to the formational aspects of education for those people who are challenged by traditional kinds of school education, especially ones which can only be accessed through a particular kind of expertise in written or spoken words. There is also

³² For Leach's philosophy of craft see: Bernard Leach, *A Potter's Book* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011). Cf Bernard Leach, *Beyond East and West: Memoirs, Portraits and Essays*, [1st publ 1978] (London: Faber, 2012), 143–44.: 'We only turned out two to three thousand pots a year between the four of us [in their workshop in Cornwall], and of these not more than ten per cent passed muster for shows.'

³³ See <http://www.edmunddewaal.com/#>; Edmund De Waal, 'Comment - Edmund de Waal on Minimalism', *Crafts* 169 (2001): 46–49.

³⁴ Sennett, *The Craftsman*, e.g. 177. Edmund De Waal, *The White Road: A Pilgrimage of Sorts* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2015). On Grayson Perry: Jacky Klein, *Grayson Perry* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2013), chap. 6.

evidence for the ways in which craft skills can train the hand and train the attention, in ways which soothe and shape lives which are experienced as disordered.³⁵

However, both ancient and modern writers suggest that the teacher too is formed: the process of learning a craft by experience means that the practitioner of a craft never stops learning. One needs to make many pots, play many clarinet pieces, compose many speeches in order to master a craft, but even when has reached a high level of competence, one continues to refine essentially the same practice, rather than moving from one practice to another. That is, repetition characterises the expert as well as the novice. The successful public repetition of one's craft practice is the evidence one needs to call oneself a craftsman. As Gregory of Nyssa puts it, if someone wants to be known as a doctor, orator or mathematician, he must prove it by his accomplished practise of the relevant *technē*. Similarly, he argues, those who are training people to be good Christians must produce people who not only seem to be Christian, but truly are – that is, who demonstrate this by repeated practice.³⁶ And repeated practice continues to shape the practitioner.³⁷

³⁵ Sennett, *The Craftsman*, 172–78. For a practical application of craft see: Christian Peterson, BBC website: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-sh/the_extraordinary_power_of_a_lump_of_wood. Accessed 20.02.19 (my thanks to Clare Bryden for pointing this out to me).

³⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Christian Mode of Life* (tr. V. W. Callahan, *St Gregory, Ascetical Works*, Washington DC, 82).

³⁷ See especially Derek Krueger, *Writing and Holiness: The Practice of Authorship in the Early Christian East* (Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 1.: the craft of (theological) writing 'shapes' and 'discipline[s]' the 'Christian author'; hagiography is 'doubly generative, producing both the saints and their authors' (ibid. 2).

e. Ethical implications

The language we use to describe what we do matters profoundly. But, precisely for that reason, it needs to be subjected to critical scrutiny. The language of craft and craft-education is no exception. Many descriptions of what we do, however, emerge as a result of a rhetorical distinction which defends our own ways of doing things in contrast with others. As I suggested earlier, the over-simplified dichotomy between lectures and conversational teaching is a variant on the ancient ‘bad orator, good philosopher’ motif which was itself used rhetorically, especially by philosophers, and which obscured the quite considerable similarities between rhetorical and philosophical education in the ancient world.³⁸ Although I do not have the space to justify this claim fully here, my assumption is that one of these similarities is that rhetorical and philosophical education shared this model of learning with other crafts or *technai*. It is notable, for example, that Socrates defends a ‘the true art of rhetoric and persuasion’ in the *Phaedrus* in terms of knowledge (knowledge of the good in relation to one’s subject and one’s audience) and learning by imitating a living example—a process which takes ‘great effort’).³⁹ One of the dangers, however, of the concept of ‘Christian formation’ is that it sounds a very positive word; it is deliberately positioning itself in relation to other (more secular) alternatives: ‘formation’ is more spiritual than ‘training’;

³⁸ Another example is the claim that early Christians wrote clear, simple prose, while their pagan counterparts were enslaved to oratory of the Second Sophistic: again, this is an over-simplification used for rhetorical purposes. See Morwenna Ludlow, ‘Christian Identity and Rhetoric about Literary Style’, in *Rhetoric and Religious Identity in Late Antiquity*, ed. Richard Flower and Morwenna Ludlow, forthcoming (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

³⁹ *Phaedrus*, e.g. 269d-270b-d, 271d-272b; 273e; 276a-b; 278a.

it is less dependent on intellect than ‘learning’. But it can all too easily become contentless.

In this lecture I have tried to give a little more content to the concept of formation, by suggesting that one might understand it in terms of craft-education. In the final part of my paper I wish to investigate some of the ethical implications of this model, particularly in relation to power.

So, what are the advantages and disadvantages of this model? Firstly, it has the advantage of realism. The model of learning something by imitating someone more experienced captures something very recognisable about learning and learners (or teaching and teachers). It is a model recognisable to those for whom neither formal lectures nor one-to-one tuition have been part of their experience. It can be seen in the experience of learning how to mend a bicycle puncture from a brother or how perform a particular dance move from a school-friend. Furthermore, the idea that learning a craft takes time, effort, commitment can be understood by reflection on learning practices such as learning how to play a sport or play a musical instrument—practices which are accessible at second-hand even to those who are un-sporty or unmusical by learning about the experience of well-known sportswomen or musicians.

Secondly, seeing formation in terms of craft-learning has the advantage of situating it firmly in community. An orator is one individual attempting to communicate to a number of others; a philosopher teaches one-to-one. Craft-learning, as many writers on the subject have shown, typically takes place in a workshop. Typically, several pupils are taught in the same workshop; a pupil may be taught different but related skills by different masters.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ See Sennett, *The Craftsman*, chap. 2; Ludlow, *Art, Craft and Theology*, chap. 10.

Furthermore, craft learning frequently demands a commitment not just to a particular workshop, but to a whole craft community. Experience is shared both within a workshop and between workshops; learning involves copying, adaptation and experimentation and these are all socially-mediated. Indeed, the learning involved in learning a craft captures something important about social identity: commonly, people are bound together by their commitment to certain practices.⁴¹ Potters commonly identify themselves as such—they are committed to a craft tradition, not just to the production of certain kinds of object. This is very noticeable in academia: academics are very often committed to the practices associated with higher education in general, and their discipline (history, philosophy etc.) functions as a guild with which they identify, beyond the bounds of their own institution. This is one of the reasons why a focus on outputs and targets alone frequently misfires.

Thirdly, however, craft-education has an interesting, but complex relationship with language. What is the form of discourse appropriate to the sort of formation involved in craft-education? This is perhaps an odd question, given that my argument above that modern writers discuss tacit knowledge; that the ancient sources stress learning by copying; that Gregory of Nyssa argues that one needs a living example rather than books. Nevertheless, although Gregory did assert that ‘guidance by example’ is ‘clearer than verbal instruction’, he also admitted that ‘there are indeed written instructions’.⁴² This suggests that there may be a discourse appropriate to craft-education, but that it will never be entirely adequate—it is decentred. This form of education does not labour under the

⁴¹ This is theme which runs throughout Sennett, *The Craftsman*, chap. especially 2; Alasdair C MacIntyre, *After Virtue a Study in Moral Theory* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), chaps 18, especially page 299-300.

⁴² Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity* 23.1.

burden of trying to show that words alone are enough. It may not be coincidental that Gregory of Nyssa has an empathetic emphasis on the idea that human discourse (*logos*) is part of the created realm and that human language is always embodied—it requires the motion of sound waves in the air or scratches of a stylus on paper.⁴³ Gregory's apophatic theology is peculiarly resistant to the idea that if only one could intuit transcendent ideas then one would know the truth. All language is dependent on material things and therefore there is always the possibility of mistakes and slippage. On the other hand, this recognition that all language is dependent on the material opens up the possibility that, used carefully, it can actually be used well in teaching at craft and forming pupils.

Related to this theme is the idea that, as craft theorists have often argued, craft skills unite head, hand and heart.⁴⁴ Gregory and his rhetorically-trained peers thought something similar about the craft of language: it unites reason and emotion, but also depends on the technical competence in handling a pen or using one's voice. Orators were also taught that – precisely because they unite head, hand and heart – words do things. That is, in addition to expressing true propositions, words can command, forbid, encourage and persuade. Craft learning and Christian formation alike need these kinds of words. Even when words fail in being entirely adequate to describe how to make a pot or fit a zip, some kind of communication is necessary to encourage, prompt and discipline the one who is learning.

These reflections might explain the kinds of text which early Christian writers produce to support Christian formation. It is rarely direct (a fact which led patristic scholars of earlier generations to rate it below truly theological dogmatic works). There are, it is true,

⁴³ See especially, *Against Eunomius* II.198-237.

⁴⁴ Sennett, *The Craftsman*, especially 50-52; Frayling, *On Craftsmanship*, 141.

monastic rules, but a far more common genre is hagiography – that is, the creation of as vivid a picture of saints as possible so that they can be a living image to emulate.⁴⁵ Narrative in general is used a great deal, as are vivid images, metaphors and similes. Preaching is essential and often calls the congregation to account, exhorts them to action, or comforts them when their energies are waning. In other words, this suggests that there is a form of discourse which is appropriate to Christian formation, but it is a form which decentres itself: it is not the most important thing in the pedagogic process.

Fourthly and finally, craft-learning has a complex relationship with power. In this there are both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, the model of craft-learning has the potential to be more inclusive than teaching envisaged as either the transfer of complex information through a lecture or pedagogy through one-to-one conversation: both of these demand relatively advanced intellectual skills which have usually been honed in relatively selective educational contexts. Craft-learning also has the potential to be more inclusive in terms of gender and class, because, across time and space, learning a craft has been an activity which has been much more widespread among women and lower social classes than other forms of education.⁴⁶ In addition, seeing formation in terms of learning a craft might be thought to destabilise some power-relationships which commonly hold in learning and teaching. Besides being more accessible as a model, the fact that craft-learning is based in community might have the potential to decentre the individual teacher, in

⁴⁵ See especially, Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse* (Berkeley [etc.]: University of California Press, 1991), chaps 2 and 3.

⁴⁶ See e.g. the Introduction to: Glenn Adamson, *The Invention of Craft* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum; Thames and Hudson, 2013).

comparison to the teacher's role as lecture-giver and even to their role in Socratic dialogue (which, as I have already noted, can be frequently highly-directive and not a process of mutual learning at all).

Of course, one needs to recognise that in any teaching relationship there is the possibility of an abuse of power. There is no getting around the fact of the teacher's greater experience; in craft-education she must be there to lead and discipline (not least for reasons of safety).⁴⁷ However, as I argued above, there is an assumption in craft-education that the master is still also a craftsman, a practitioner and therefore a learner: the master-potter is still making pots; the musician conducting the master-class still sings or plays the violin. As a teacher, therefore, they are still opening themselves up to the possibility of being shaped by their craft. If craft practice has the potential to change the practitioner, then there is a vulnerability and open-endedness to the process of craft-practice and of teaching that practice. This is particularly the case if all practitioners acknowledge Jesus Christ as their ultimate exemplar and teacher. The question is, then, whether a good teacher on this model is more open to change than Socrates' ideal philosopher.

It must be admitted too that craft-learning and teaching has not and does not always function like this. In particular, in the era in which the early Christian authors were writing, many craftspeople worked in workshops with appalling conditions. There was widespread if not universal use of child labour and many craftspeople were slaves. For this reason, although Mike Higton has himself proposed that 'all university learning takes the form of learning a craft – indeed, it takes the form of a craft succession' which could usefully be

⁴⁷ My thanks to John de Gruchy for reminding me of this point.

thought of as a form of apprenticeship, he ultimately shies away from this analogy, concerned that the 'language of apprenticeship is deeply gendered', not only relying on the notion of the 'master', but also conjuring up a picture of 'paternal authority, guild hierarchy, and corporal punishment, which should make us deeply uncomfortable'.⁴⁸ To conclude, then, the question which my discussion here raises most insistently—and which should be the focus of future discussion—is the question of what power relations are hidden in all our models of learning, teaching and formation. To what extent does the model of craft-education, which decentres attempts to master knowledge through language and which subordinates the human teacher to Christ, resist the human abuse of power? How should it be developed theologically so as to strengthen that resistance?

⁴⁸ Mike Higton, *A Theology of Higher Education* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 181–85.

Quotations from pp. 181-2.